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ABSTRACT

Two samples of entering college freshmen (at the University of Maryland, College Park) comprising two different generational cohorts (1976 cohort, n=1491; 1994 cohort, n=2516) were compared to determine the similarities and differences to attitudinal and behavioral items on a survey administered at a summer orientation program. The data were analyzed by gender and cohort year using chi-square and MANOVA. Results indicated gender differences in most items for both cohorts. Likert-type items were analyzed by gender and cohort and a significant cohort effect and gender effect were found, indicating a need to consider how current programs and services are prepared to meet the needs of current entering students and that gender differences be taken into consideration. (Author)

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Generational Differences in Academic and Social Attitudes of Entering Freshmen 1974- 1994

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Computer time for this project was provided by the Computer Science Center at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Two samples of entering college freshman comprising two different generational cohorts were compared to determine the similarities and differences to attitudinal and behavioral items on an survey administered at a summer orientation program. The data were analyzed by gender and cohort year using chi-square and MANOVA. Results indicated gender differences most items for both cohorts. Likert-type items were analyzed by gender and cohort and a significant cohort effect and gender effect were found, indicating a need to consider how current programs and services are prepared to meet the needs of current entering students and that gender differences be taken into consideration.

The input of students is an important component of the in the decision-making process of student affairs faculty and administrators (Thurman & Malaney, 1989). These researchers highlighted the effectiveness of the use of survey research in assessing student concerns. Monitoring student concerns on a systematic basis is important in order to identify trends that will inform practitioners how to better assist students throught the developmental process. One trend of note recently is the the emergence of the label "Generation X" for the generation of traditional age college students currently enrolled in higher education. The emergence of a distinct group of students provide justification for identifying these students as a "cohort" much like the "Baby Boomers," who are likely to be parents of the current population of college students, as well as educators and administrators on many college campuses. One way to determine when a generation begins and ends is to think of a group as a "cohort" which has been defined by Rosow (1978) as originally a demographic notion that has both social and personal referents. Ryder (1965), cited in Rosow (1978), defined cohort as persons who are born together or entering a particular system in a given year or period who then age together. These groups have experienced or were exposed to given events of a period that are social/historical events or personal/life-stage events (Rosow, 1978), such as entering college. Thus, students entering college at the same time "have similar experiences that may affect them the same way" (Rosow, 1978, p. 67). A difficulty when identifying cohorts has to do with boundaries. Identifying boundaries, where cohorts begin or end, becomes probelmatic when the number of events that can serve as distinguishing characteristics are few, which causes cohorts to blend into one another. When identifying cohorts the major issue is to (1) specify crucial cohort experiences, and (2) to explain how they produce cohort effects.

"Baby Boomers"

One cohort that continues to be defined by their common experiences is the "baby boomer" cohort. As a result of the large number of births during what was labeled as the "baby

boom" (1946 to 1964) there was a tremendous increase in the number of traditional age college students and correspondingly an unprecendented expansion of college enrollment. Along with policies that expanded the availability of higher education to groups of Americans previously denied equal access to higher education, many of the practices on college campuses changed to reflect the needs of this new generation of college students. This cohort represented the more diversity than had ever been present in college.

College enrollments at predominantly White campuses increased by larger numbers of women, students of color, and nontraditional students. This "new" population of students required changes in how colleges saw to meeting their needs. For instance, for those educators working in student affairs, the concept of "en loco parentis" gave way to the development of new approaches and theoretical propositions for providing student services to the diverse student population. This generation was largely responsible for college and universities redesigning their way of providing services and programs to students.

Other defining characteristics of the baby boomer cohort include: that they were self-discovering, liberal, altruistic, humanistic, in need of immediate gratification, and they possess feeling of being owed something (Bradford and Raines, 1992). Another is their sheer numbers. Strauss and Howe (1993) estimated the population to be approximately 79 million. The first cohort in 1943 have ranked "among the most self-absorbed in American history,...while the last cohort are remembered by college faculties as the last to show Boomish streaks of intellectual arrogance and social immaturity" (p. 291). Strauss and Howe (1993) also reported that the downtrend in SAT scores spanned the majority of the entire Boom period, from 1946 to 1963.

"Generation X"

The "Generation X" label has been the focus of a myriad of representations and has, as pointed out by Brinkley (1994), become "a derisive media catchphrase, (and) a snide put down" (p. 1). Many of the students identified by this label are highly resistant to it. The term

"Generation X' was coined by Coupland (1991). Coupland argued that baby boomers are engaged in "clique maintenance" which he defined as the need of one generation to view the following generation as so lacking that it cannot measure up in order to improve it's own ego.

What could underlie much of the controversy about "Generation X" is the fact that many of those responsible for the label have described it as a "generational clash" (Bradford & Raines, 1992). In many colleges and universities, there are three distinct cohorts or generations trying to co-exist. These include those who were born before the end of World War II, those called baby boomers, and the "X'ers." These three groups' core values were identified by Bradford and Raines (1992) and can be linked to particular generation specific events that help to shape and define them as distinct. In many cases, the bulk of those responsible for teaching and serving today's college students are members of the baby boomer cohort.

Keppler (1994) compiled a list of traits commonly attributed to "X'ers": important, demanding, anxious, pessimistic, cautious, stressed, and apolitical. He found these to be somewhat ironic or paradoxical and chose to identity a characteristic that he has observed in them, resiliency, He also developed a personal list of traits exhibited by this group. for which he developed the acronym "DIRECT 6" (determined, introspective, recreational wizards, enterprising, challenging, and tolerant). This compilation of traits indeed pose a challenge to student affairs professionals that should be welcomed by those interested in affecting the development of students (Keppler, 1994).

Strauss and Howe (1993) identified this generation of young traditional college aged as "13ers", who are more likely to feel that the real world is gearing up to punish them in the future. They have been tarnished by the assessments of their schooling and intelligence, which was despaired in such publications as "A Nation at Risk", "The Closing of the American Mind," and "What Do Seventeen-Year-Olds Know?" (Strauss & Howe, 1993). Additionally, according to Strauss and Howe (1993), the message sent out to 13ers and their employers is that they have

received an inferior education and have inferior minds. Further, they face an uncertain economic future, with housing and educational costs soaring ahead of inflation and the salaries they received unable to keep pace. Students in this generation Strauss and Howe (1993) argued, have reversed the trends such as SAT decline, youth crime, and substance abuse but have been unable to shed the negative light that has been focused on them.

Even though they may be perceived as "slackers and whiners," the fact is that they have a very complex world to contend with. Newsweek magazine in a special issue focusing on Generation X (1994) pointed out are likely to leave college with double the debt burden than a 1977 baby boomer college graduate. In addition, they face arguably the worst job market since World War II and, according to Strauss and Howe (1993), enter a labor force bearing much of the nation's new burden of foreign competition and debt.

Other characteristics of this generation are that they are among the most racially diverse, include more immigrants, are more likely to be affected by divorce, and on their way to becoming less college educated than the baby boomer generation. The latter trend is noteworthy as college completion rates decline and the economic stakes of higher education rises (Strauss & Howe, 1993).

Current Trends

The decline the birthrate ofin this post baby boom generation was a contributing factor of decreases in college enrollment. According to Solomon and Wingard (1991) this trend was in contrast to the postwar baby boom which led to an unprecedented expansion in American higher education as these students entered tradition college ages. Another characteristic of the change in enrollment patterns of traditional age students is that the birth rates of students of color have not declined and that, coupled with the immigration patterns of people of color, make this population a source of significant numbers of traditional college age students. However, the

progression rate of students of color is lower than what would be expected given current demographic trends (Solomon & Wingard, 1991).

These trends in college attendance do not suggest that those available to the labor market will be of color and possess a college education. A recent report by the American Council on Education (1994) indicated that the entry into the labor market of Black colleges graduates do not necessarily led to the same salaries than similarly situated white students. It was reported that Black college graduates could expect to earn hundreds of dollars less than similarly educated White college graduates.

Given the historical trends in the opportunities available for college graduates as well as recent trends, it is important that higher education restructure their programs to adapt to the needs of today's college student population. In relation to this generational shift, the extent to which colleges and universities are providing programs based on premises derived from previous generations of students is a topic that needs further exploration. Given the current projections about opportunies for some college graduates, it is important to understand how the changing demographics of current college students juxtaposed with students of previous generations will inform practitioners on how to develop programs that will assist students in dealing with the structural barriers that exist within wider society.

In an attempt to address the question of changing attitudes, needs and interests of students the purpose of this study was to examine the responses of students in the same institution at two points in time, 1974 and 1994. These two cohorts are representative of the "baby boomers" (1974) and "Generation X" (1994). More specifically, the purposes of this study were to assess whether the attitudes, behaviors and needs of students have been consistent over time and to determine whether the similarities or differences are related to gender. The findings may also assist those responsible for program development to adapt or strengthen their

programs based on whether they continue to promote the development of today's college students.

METHOD

Representative samples of incoming freshmen students were administered the University New Student Census (UNSC) in 1974 and 1994 during summer orientation at a large mid-eastern public research institution. From those cohorts, a total 1491 students, of which 707 (47%) were male and 784 (53%) were female were included from 1974, and 2516, 1,297 male (52%) and 1,221 female, from the 1994 cohort were included in the analyses. The data were analyzed by multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) or chi-square tests.

RESULTS

Highest academic degree you intend to obtain? Men were more likely than women in both cohorts to have higher degree aspirations, although the gap lessened for the 1994 cohort. More women in the 1974 cohort indicated that a bachelor's degree was the highest degree they intended to obtain (42%), followed by the master's degree (33.7%). Men's response was reversed, indicating a master's degree (29.9%) closely followed bachelor's degree (27.4%).

Both men and women in 1994 indicated obtaining master's degrees as their top choice (39% and 41%). A slightly higher percentage of men than women indicated that they wanted to obtain a doctorate degree (18% to 17%). A higher percentage of men than women indicated bachelor's degree (21% to 17%).

Main reason you decided to attend the University. Overall, there was not a difference in the top responses of males and females in either cohort in the top three responses for this item. For the 1974 cohort, about a third of males and females attended the university because of the academic program they wanted was offered. Almost equal percentages of men and women attended the university because of its geographical location and the cost. In 1994, men and women selected the same top three responses in similar percentages.

Most influential in your decision to attend college? There was no significant difference in the response pattern of the two cohorts for the top two responses. In the 1974 cohort, men and women indicated father (43% and 31% respectively) while a slightly smaller percentage of women indicated that their mother (25%) was most influential. Nearly equal percentages of men and women (24% and 23%) identified "others" as most influential in their decision to attend college. In 1994, a higher percentage of women selected parents (49%) than men (40%). Current students who attend the university were also influential for the 1994 cohort (10 % for men and 13% for women).

What do you expect will be the hardest part of adjusting to college for you? What are now referred to as study skills topped the responses in 1974 and 1994. Almost equal percentages of men and women (42% and 40% respectively) selected the same top two responses in 1974: studying efficiently and budgeting time wisely. Men and women in 1994 differed in the order of responses, with men selecting studying efficiently (27%) followed by budgeting time (24%). Women reversed the two responses, selecting budgeting time (25%) and studying efficiently.

Most important current educational objective? Career related responses were the top choices of men and women in both cohorts. In almost equal percentages, career related responses were selected by over half of the men and women in both cohorts. For the 1974 cohort, significant differences were found as the largest percentage of women (32%) indicated that obtaining skills directly applicable to a career while men (37%) indicated a direction for career or life's work. The for the next highest response, choices were reversed by women (28%) and men (25%).

In 1994, greater percentage of men than women indicated that learning skills directly applicable to career goals (46% to 37% respectively) was most important. More women than men indicated that they wanted to learn as much as they could about several fields of study (17%

to 16%). Almost equal percentages of men and women indicated they wanted to decide upon a career goal (14%).

The most likely reason for remaining at the university and completing graduation requirements? In 1974, men and women chose the same top two responses: a college degree is needed in order to enter chosen job (35% and 28% respectively); and must have a degree in order to enter graduate or professional school (26% and 18%). Next, men selected that a college graduate obtained better jobs (15%) and women selected "other" (18%).

Both men and women in 1994 indicated the same top two responses: that a degree was necessary to enter their chosen career (28% and 35% respectively) and that the degree was needed to enter graduate school (26% and 19%). The next highest responses were the same although women selected the response "a college degree is the only way to enter chosen job" (25%) and "college graduates get better jobs" (22%) and men reversed these two responses (24% and 25% respectively).

How many hours per week will you be spending in a part-time job? The intention to work was greater for the 1974 sample than the 1994 sample. A higher percentage of students were not looking or planning to work in the 1994 cohort. In 1974 men and women indicated, in about equal percentages, that they did not have a job and did not plan to work (34% and 35%) or that they did not work but hoped to work (25% and 29%).

In 1994, men and women had the same top responses. Approximately 43 percent of each indicated that they did not plan to work. A quarter of women and almost 22 percent of men indicated that they hoped to find work. Approximately 10 percent of men and women who worked did so for 10-14 hours.

Which one of the following issues do you feel is most important for the society to solve? In 1974, women and men selected the same top response, economy and inflation (28% and 29 % respectively). Women indicated racism (20%) and men indicated ecology and pollution as

their second highest response. Integrity of those in power was also a choice of equal percentages of men and women (14%).

In 1994, a higher percentage of women than men indicated that crime and violence was the most important issue for society to resolve (49& to 40%). Almost equal percentages of men and women felt that racism was the most important issue (21% and 20%). Next for men was the economy (9%) while women selected ecology (9%).

Which one of the following is most important to your long-term career choice? There were differences in responses between women and men in 1974. Women indicated their ability to work with people (25%), intrinsic interest in field (23%) and make an important contribution to society (16%). Men indicated intrinsic interest in field (21%), make an important contribution to society (16%) and high anticipated earnings (15%).

SIgnificant differences were found for men and women in 1994. The top response for men was high anticipated earnings (29%) and for women it was the ability to make an important contribution to society (20%). The response "Other" was indicated as the next top response. Almost 15 percent of women indicated that they wanted a well respected or prestigious occupation.

Which of the following kinds of extracurricular activities is of the most interest to you? Interest in intramurals continued in it's importance to men and increased in significance to women. Significant differences were found between men and women in 1974. Men were most interested in intramural or intercollegiate athletics (43%) and special interest groups (19%). Women were most interested in special interest groups (22%) and musical or dramatic productions (19%).

In 1994, forty-two percent of men selected intramurals and twenty-three percent of women. The second highest response, a special interest group, was the same for men and women, although a higher percentage of men than women indicated this response (24% to 21%).

Table 1 presents the chi-square values for multiple choice items by gender for the 1974 and 1994 cohort.

Likert item responses

1974 Cohort

Table 2 presents the results for the multivariate analysis of variance for both cohorts. A significant overall gender effect was achieved for the 1974 cohort ($F = 5.61$, $p < .05$). For the item, "I expect to maintain a B average in my college studies" univariate significance was not found. Both men and women were likely to agree with this item (men = 1.87; women = 1.84). On the item, "I will likely end up majoring in a different academic field than what now seems appropriate to me," men and women did not significantly differ (men = 3.57; women = 3.55), with both responding in the neutral to disagree range. A significant univariate effect was found for the item, "The university should recruit Black students," with males responding more in the neutral range than females (men = 3.17; women = 2.95) indicating significant gender differences for this item.

The 1974 cohort was asked to indicate which one of a choice of areas the student was most interested in seeking counseling or educational skills services while at the university. Men and women both selected counseling regarding vocational and

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educational plans (41% and 46%) and learning to study more efficiently as their top choices. This item was presented in a Likert-type format on the 1994 census.

1994 Cohort

Men were more neutral on seeking counseling regarding educational/vocational counseling rather than women (mean = 2.98) and to disagree with seeking emotional/social counseling (mean = 4.01). Women had less disagreement with seeking counseling about emotional/social issues (mean=3.95) and greater agreement with seeking educational/vocational counseling (mean = 2.84). These Likert-type items were grouped and achieved overall multivariate significant gender effect ($F = 31.29$, $p < .05$). Univariate significance was found for seeking educational/vocational counseling, indicating a significant difference in the mean responses for men and women.

The results of a MANOVA by gender and cohort year (1974 and 1994) as main effects included only the three likert-type items on both surveys is presented in Table 3. For the two-way MANOVA analysis a significant gender effect was found ($F = 15.10$, $p < .05$), with univariate significance found on two Likert items, the university should recruit Blacks ($F = 40.24$, $p < .05$) and expect to change my major ($F = 4.79$, $p < .000$).

The cohort year effect also was significant ($F=197.77$, $p <.05$), with two items having univariate significance, I expect to change my major ($F=86.51$, $p < .05$) and that is will not be hard to earn a 3.0 grade point average ($F=428.00$, $p < .05$). The interaction (cohort x gender) was not significant.

DISCUSSION

Historically traditional academic criteria have been used to predict success for entering students. According to Johnson (1995), the use of other factors, such as the ability to communicate, involvement in extracurricular activities, and interest in seeking appropriate academic assistance, have been suggested as appropriate for determining success. Further,

says Johnson, "if educators in colleges and universities are to address these concerns appropriately, it is imperative they acquire a multidimensional understanding of the students and their developmental needs" (p. 476).

This understanding of students developmental needs may change over time. The proliferation of studies in the college student development area has uncovered a number of special issues that face segments within the student population, some of

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whom are more adversely affected than others, particularly with respect to gender and race.

Surveys are one way of obtaining data over time to analyze trends within student populations. The student in the cohorts were similar in terms of their responses as to why they chose to attend the University. The factors they indicated, academic programs, location, and cost have historically been used by students to determine where they will attend. What one might have expected to change was the importance of cost, as the cost of attending college has outpaced inflation over the past fifteen years.

The role that parents play in influencing a student's decision to attend college should not be ignored. Clearly, however, "others" are influential in the decision-making process and it might be important to look more closely at who these "others" are. That university students are influential might be used as a way to reach more students through involving students and even alumni in the recruiting process.

That adjustment of college is one of the most difficult issues facing students has been corroborated in the literature (Allen, 1988; Tracey & Sedlacek, 1985). Students in both cohorts

identified study skills areas as the hardest adjustment indicating the importance of this issue for college students over time. This has been reported to be true for a variety of student populations (Noldon & Sedlacek (in press); Kim & Sedlacek (1996); Johnson (1995) including minority students, honors students, and at-risk students.

The importance of career issues for students resonated through a number of items. As the student's most important educational objective and reason for persisting at the University, concern about career issues continues for many students. It is apparent that students are in college in order to increase their opportunity to develop skills and learn more about careers. Even their choice of degree was related to their need to have a degree to enter chosen career.

In light of these findings, it is important that the appropriate connections be made for students. Collaborations among student affairs professionals and faculty will greatly enhance opportunities for students to obtain information about careers and obtain the skills and experiences necessary for entering their chosen fields.

Many of the response patterns were to be expected along gender lines. As more women and students of color enter into college, it is important that our practices reflect the diversity in the population. In addition, we need to pay attention to the fact that some of the interests and concerns of women and men have changed over time, and our programming efforts should reflect these changes.

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